CHARLES FROHMAN

Speaks Upon the Growth of His Stars.

THE THEATRE-GOERS TASTES

It is the Play That Makes the Actress as it is Opportunity That Makes the Man and This Would be so in Maude Adams' Case.

NEW YORK, Feb. 25.—The place breathed the energy of some tremendous personality. It was the crowded day before his departure for Europe.

All appointments were being kept to the minute.

William Seymour, General Stage Director, hurried out with his hands filled with notes and memoranda, as I passed along the corridor, lined on either side by great oaken cabinets, leading to the private office of Charles Frohman.

As I entered, he stood eating his lunch from the tray that rested upon his desk. And I, having had mine, declined participation in it, and threw myself in a great leathern chair to be confronted by scores of photographs of stars, female and male. To look at them was to think of Mr. Frohman as the big brother of them all. Those who know him best say that the only companions Charles Frohman has are his stars - - - the only conversation that interests him is new ideas, the only scenes he cares for are the views from his window at the streets of New York and of London.

The man whom all these stars affectionately refer to as "C. F." has the manner of a man surcharged with energy.

He is in his office every morning before nine, however far into the night rehearsals or new productions may keep him awake. His conversation is never theoretical or hypothetical. It is a series of statements never uttered until thought into the most economic form. A man who, at his day's work, is lavished with his means beyond the wildest dreams of extravagance, he never wastes a single word in conversation. Mr. Frohman never argues; he states conclusions.

Renewing an acquaintance, begun in his apartments at the Savory Hotel in London, when, one night, I sat with him upon the balcony overlooking the Thames, and gazed up the river at Westminister, with Parliament in session, my greeting now, as then, was more by a kindly twinkle of the eye than by a tamely conventional salute.

"I am glad you have come," was his beginning, "because, before sailing for Europe, I wish to state my gratitude to the press for exactly reflecting the motives, the significance, all the feelings that impelled me to the most important production of my managerial career. I mean 'The Jesters.'

The feeling that gripped me most and perhaps determined me to secure that play for Maude Adams was precisely the sensation that made me instantly fond of J. M. Barrie's 'Peter Pan'. There can be only one Peter Pan, we all know, as there is only one Midsummer Night's Dream, to which the spirit of Peter was frequently likened. But 'The Jesters,' like the story of Barrie's boy Pan, is the glorification of youth. It is the embodiment of all that is optimistic, vigorous and healthful in life."

"Then why don't you produce more plays like 'The Jesters' and 'Peter Pan,' Mr. Frohman?"

"For two reasons. Because plays like 'The Jesters' only come along in decades, and in the next place, when they are written they do not leap into popularity of themselves, but through the interpretation given them by a popular star. That is, the audiences go to see the star and stay to love the play."

"Will the success of 'The Jesters' induce you to buy more poetic plays abroad?"

"The significance in the great success of 'The Jesters' is not so much a returning public taste for the poetic drama as it is the complete development of Maude Adams. And I'll show you the steps in her progress from a superb actress to a finished artist.

"When Miss Adams played 'L'Aiglon,' and crowded the large Knickerbocker Theatre, at the same time Sarah Bernhardt was filling the small Garden Theatre, the press and the public had their first demonstration of what Maude Adams could express in works of pity."

"It was a trying task. To carry it off was to induce her audiences, not only to pity the prisoner at the Court of Austria, but to respect the son of Napoleon the Great. Every moment of the play the audience had to be made to feel for and with the boy.

"This is what Maude Adams did in 'L'Aiglon' in English, while Madame Sarah was achieving the same results in French.

"As certainly as you knew that a great French artist had arrived in New York, you felt that a great American artist was arriving.

"Two weeks ago Maude Adams appeared in 'The Jesters,' assuming a character that required humanness and poetry of expression. The part calls for the management of an intense and lengthy love scene, acted by a woman in the guise of a man. The sympathy of the audience must be gained for the character, not for the actress playing the character. 'Chicot,' the jester, is a young man filled with a poetic feeling and subject to the same quick comedy turns required and given by Edwin Booth in his performance of 'Brutus' in 'The Fall of the Tarquins.'

"My test of a good actress is the ability to play a straight character so truly that the author will unconsciously murmur to himself, 'I've met just such a person.' But my test of an artist is the power to depict a character of conflicting impulses and be equally true to each impulse as it arises.

"That was the glory of Booth's Brutus. That is the excellence of Maude Adams' Chicot. A new Maude Adams has arrived."

"Do you mean new to you, Mr. Frohman?"

"Not at all. It is the play that makes the actress, as it is opportunity that makes the man. We had the satisfaction of feeling this would one day be so with Maude Adams' case. We knew it, in fact, when last summer she acted 'L'Aiglon' in the Greek Theatre of the University of California and aroused five thousand people, largely made up of students - - not the easiest of audiences—into the enthusiasm of cheers."

"Yet the wonder is, Mr. Frohman, that Miss Adams should turn aside from the surety of 'Peter Pan' or 'Quality Street' to the experiment of 'The Jesters.'"

"Miss Adams could have gone on acting Mr. Barrie's plays for many seasons to come and doubtless will one day return to them. But in those plays it is her personality that charms in 'The Jesters' it is her artistry that compels. It was her own wish that she essay the poetic drama. And the success of it all proves to me that the way to make the poetic drama succeed is to lift it into popularity upon the shoulders of a great popular star."

"It is said you are to bring Miss Adams to London. Why haven't you done so sooner?"

"For the wisdom there is in patience. I chose to wait for the full maturity of America's most popular actress, and exhibit her to London audiences at her best. But more than that I have always wished that Miss Adams visit London with a repertoire.

"Now my idea of obtaining a repertoire is not the simple act of saying, 'I shall play this and that and the other.' A repertoire is made, not chosen. The only way to get a repertoire is to have had a series of successes year after year. Hard work and popular success bring repertoires - -not a vaguely imagined fitness for certain parts, selected off hand."

"But why bring your stars at all to London, when here in America they can play to greater audiences and to greater returns?"

"In the first place, because it's the finest kind of development for the actress or the actor, and the liberalizing of the public. An American actress before an English audience finds herself confronted with new tastes, new appreciation, new demands. She must meet them or fail. What does this result in? Versatility, flexibility and, in the end, a firmer grip on her art. Just as, long ago, I predicted that the work of our home playwrights would be taken up abroad, so, too, I feel that the American actress will firmly establish herself in the older countries. It is a fine result for us as a nation."

"How do you go about procuring plays abroad for America Mr Frohman? Do you limit your negotiations to established successes in Europe?"

"No. I start out by asking certain requirements of every play. If it's drama, it must have healthfulness and comedy as well as seriousness. We are a young people, but only in the sense of healthy mindedness. There is no real taste among us for the erotic or the decadent. It is foreign to us because, as a people, we have not yet felt the corroding touch of decadence. Nor is life here all drab. Hence I expect light as well as shadows in every play I accept. Naturally I am also influenced by the fitness of chief parts for my chief stars. But I often purchase a manuscript simply after learning its central idea. I commissioned Clyde Fitch and Cosmo Gordon Lennox to go to work on "Her Sister' after a half hour's account of the main idea. Her work in that play, by the way, is the best instance I could give you of the growth of Ethel Barrymore."

"Is it true that Miss Barrymore will undertake Shakespeare next September?"

"Yes, and what has not yet been announced, she will not only play Rosalind in 'As You Like It,' but I intend to present her in the old comedies - -especially in 'She Stoops to Conquer' and 'The School for Scandal.' These will follow a season of twenty weeks in 'As You Like It.'

"The particular skill that Ethel Barrymore has obtained - - and this is a test of an actress worth remembering - - is the art of acting scenes that are essentially melodramatic in an unmelodramatic manner.

"After all, what is melodrama? Life itself is melodrama. And life, put upon the stage, only seems untrue when it is acted melodramatically, that is, unnaturally.

"I would venture to submit to Miss Barrymore's delivery any scene supposedly melodramatic, and, if it is not absolutely theatric in thought and in dialogue, I am sure she would carry conviction for its every moment by the naturalness and simplicity of style which she has acquired. I look for a series of Shakespearean revivals as the result of her forthcoming Rosalind."

"It was recently said, Mr. Frohman, that until very lately you had stopped buying farces. Why was this?"

"Shakespeare invented farce comedy, and whenever I consider the purchase of a farce comedy, I compare its scenes with the greatest of all farces, 'The Taming of the Shrew.' And whenever I produce a farce, it goes without saying that its spirit is akin to 'The Taming of the Shrew.'"

At that a bell rang. The faithful "Willie" silently entered the office and announced a name. For the first time I realized the length of my visit.

"Well, Mr. Frohman," said I, "as 'Peter Pan' would say to Wendy, 'Mind the tree tops on your travels'."

"Home soon!" he rejoined.

Mrs. Fowler's Free Lectures

At Astoria Theatre beginning Wednesday, Feb. 26, 2:30 p. m., ladies only; Wednesday, Feb. 26, 8 p. m., gentlemen only; Thursday, Feb. 27, 8 p. m., to all; Friday, Feb. 28, 8 p. m., to all; Sunday, March 1, 2:30 p. m., to all.

Phrenological examinations and health consultations given daily at Occident Hotel, from 9 a. m. to 9 p. m., till March 11th. Her classes on the use of electricity to cure disease will begin March 3rd at 2:30 and 7:30 p. m.